

Latino Engagement Taskforce Cohort 5 Report

Introduction

Commerce City is experiencing dynamic growth, emerging as one of Colorado's most rapidly expanding communities. With a population estimated at 68,245 as of July 1, 2023, – a 9.3% increase since 2020 – the city is evolving swiftly. Yet, even as it grows, Commerce City remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all its residents.

Since 2015, the city has consistently taken proactive steps to ensure its growth does not come at the expense of equity. Instead, Commerce City has made it a priority to build a community where everyone, particularly Latino residents who have been historically underrepresented, feels seen, heard, and valued. The city's approach to inclusivity aligns with principles outlined by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which emphasizes respecting all citizens, providing equitable access to resources, promoting fairness, and engaging the entire community in meaningful decision-making processes.

As Commerce City expands, its population becomes increasingly diverse, making it one of Colorado's most multicultural cities. The Latino population, which plays a significant role in shaping the city's cultural landscape, is central to this diversity. However, challenges remain, particularly for families in the southern part of the city who live with mixed-documentation status. These families often face barriers related to language, legal status, and social isolation, which can hinder their participation in civic life.

To address these challenges, the Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET), in partnership with Commerce City, works tirelessly to encourage Latino residents to take advantage of the city's resources and participate fully in community life. The task force, supported by Cultivando and the assigned Commerce City liaison, is dedicated to ensuring that as Commerce City grows, it remains a place where diversity is celebrated, and everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

History of Latino Engagement Task Force

The LET program has consistently focused on continuous improvement in various areas to strengthen the relationship between the Latino community and Commerce City. Key areas of focus areas in the past have included:

- Enhancing language access to ensure effective communication
- Implementing activities that celebrate Latino culture
- Improving rapport and community-building opportunities between the Latino community and the Commerce City Police Department
- Sustaining ongoing engagement and communication between Commerce City and the Latino community
- Developing strategies to protect families at risk of displacement
- Co-developing strategies with community members, the Police Department, and Parks and Recreation staff

Program Overview

Launched in December 2015 with Cultivando's support, the LET has operated through multiple cohorts. Each cohort has contributed to the city's understanding of community needs and priorities. The fifth cohort of LET included 17 community members who were program graduates and focused on improving city engagement and service delivery to the Latino community. LET #5 met with a variety of departments and divisions to learn about city infrastructure, police-community collaborations, code enforcement regulations, recreation activities, and the processes of the City Clerk's Office. These insights have informed strategies to enhance community services and address emerging challenges.

First Meeting Summary

On Friday, Oct. 20, 2023, City Manager Jason Rogers, Bilingual Communications Specialist Alondra Gonzalez Carrillo, and Director of Strategic Partnerships Jason Dennison met with the fifth cohort of LET for the first time to introduce the program, give an overview of the city, and host an open conversation.

Topics Discussed

- Jason Rogers opened the meeting with a welcoming presentation
- A group photo was taken to commemorate the event
- Alondra Gonzalez Carrillo provided a brief overview of the LET program and what participants can expect. The presentation detailed the city's centers and facilities and gave an overview of its organizational structure
- An open forum with Jason Dennison allowed for two-way conversation and addressed various community concerns and inquiries
- Resources provided related to AccessC3, subscribing for notifications, and emergency contact for domestic abuse with Spanish available

Comments by Cohort

- A member reported a lack of drainage on her street (8690 Brighton Rd.), suggesting her home might be in an unincorporated area of Adams County, clarity is needed for residents
- Members expressed their preference for quieter streets
- Concerns about the lack of resources and information available in certain areas were raised
- Feedback indicated that a "Coffee with a Cop" event was initially held only in English, highlighting the importance of inclusivity in such events
- Inquiries were made about regulating marijuana use in public spaces
- Questions were raised about follow-up on domestic violence cases, with references to BOVA (Brighton Office for Victim Assistance)

Second Meeting Summary

On Friday, Nov. 17, 2023, Deputy Chief of Police Greg Sadar, Detective Richard Rodriguez, and Officer Miguel Castellano engaged in an open dialogue with the cohort.

Topics Discussed

- Community Differences: Residents from the south and north parts of the city face distinct challenges, highlighting the diverse needs within the community.

- Immigration & Law Enforcement: Emphasized that immigration status is not a priority when performing police duties.
- Domestic Violence: By law, arrests are often made in domestic violence cases, with victims subsequently connected to the Victim Services Unit.
- Public Smoking Laws: Smoking marijuana in public spaces, including front porches, is illegal unless the area is fenced in the backyard.
- Law Enforcement Responsibilities: Officers enforce laws as voted by citizens, such as marijuana regulations
- Police Resources: The department, at the time had funding for 137 officers, with 75 on patrol and 20 in training. Typically, 12 officers cover eight districts during any shift.
- Traffic Stops: Residents can request a supervisor if they feel uncomfortable during a traffic stop.
- Youth Programs: The department offers various youth programs, including a Police Academy for children, summer camps, and partnerships with Boys & Girls Clubs.
- Public Safety Engagement: Residents are encouraged to attend City Council meetings or establish Neighborhood Watch programs to help improve safety.
- Resources provided included links to online crime reporting and domestic violence support information

Comments by Cohort

- Vehicle Impoundment: Concerns about financial strain when retrieving impounded vehicles. The police department provided a contact number (303-655-2308) for assistance.
- School Safety Officers: Inquiry about reinstating school safety officers in Adams 14 schools. Residents were advised to attend school district meetings to advocate for this.
- Special Needs Programs: No current police programs for children with special needs, but possible resources through Boys & Girls Clubs.
- Signage Issues: Questions about requesting new street signage were directed to Public Works.
- Increased Signage: Recommendation for enhanced public awareness about smoking regulations through better signage.
- Resource Visibility: Recommendation to boost the visibility of BOVA (domestic violence resources) on social media.
- Youth Safety Programs: Recommendation to create brochures detailing available safety programs for children and expand firearm safety education throughout the city.

Third Meeting Summary

On Friday, Jan. 19, 2024, Ernesto Galvin from the Code Enforcement Division and Roxzana Martinez from the Community Well-Being Division gave presentations related to their divisions, at the time both divisions were part of the Community Development Department.

Topics Discussed with Code Enforcement Division

- Scope of Work: Code Enforcement works to uphold the compliance of the municipal code, and collaborates with building safety, construction, and the Clerk's Office on business license inspections.
- At the time, the division had six inspectors but has enough budget for nine total full-time employees.

- The municipal code is a valuable tool for understanding what is and is not allowed in the city.
- All concerns in the city can be reported through the AccessC3 portal, if residents cannot report through the app, they can call Code Enforcement, but responses may take longer. Inspectors have seven days to respond to reports submitted through AccessC3.
- Common violations include weed maintenance (height of grass), outdoor storage of household items, discarded trash/debris, overgrown vegetation, dangerous sidewalks (snow and ice), parking on lawns, obstructions caused by plants on sidewalks or signs, and inoperable vehicle storage
- Resources like the MyC3 tool trailer exist to help with yard work

Comments by Cohort

- How does Code Enforcement operate in mobile home parks? Code Enforcement does apply but with limitations based on city and HOA rules.
- When is a tree considered a hazard? If a tree poses a risk, it violates the municipal code.
- There's potential to expand support for residents unable to maintain their yards, similar to snow guardians, but for summer tasks.
- There should be a program like Snow Guardians but for Yard Work, currently, this service does not extend to yard work.
 - *Note: Since this meeting was held, staff has been working to implement this type of program for yard maintenance.*
- Historical Community Support: The Derby Women group once helped residents in Derby clean their homes; such community efforts could be revisited.

Topics Discussed with Community Well-Being Division

- The division, established in 2023, focuses on family and senior services, commonly known as CWB for its initials in English. It offers assistance without requiring legal residency status, only Commerce City residency.
- CWB helps with tenant assistance applications (requires bank statements, ID, pay stubs, utility bills, etc.).
- Organize workshops on tenant rights and other essential topics.
- Collaboration with churches and city departments for backpack and meal distribution and mobile showers.
- Assistance for homeless individuals in obtaining resources and documentation.
- Spanish-speaking support to create a sense of belonging and trust within the community.
- Youth and Family Support: The division works closely with apartment management and schools and offers programs like the Back to School Backpack Giveaway and other events
- Direct relationships to resource hub: The South Platte Crossing Building, previously known as the Adams Tower houses various resources, including programs for families, drug assistance, and KidsFirst, available to Commerce City residents.
 - *Note: The CWB Division is now located at the South Platte Crossing Building on the fifth floor*
- The division seeks community input to shape its offerings and grow effectively.
- The meeting highlighted the importance of community involvement and the need for residents to actively engage with city resources. The new Community Wellbeing Division is poised to offer substantial support but requires feedback and participation from the community to grow and effectively meet local needs.

Direct Feedback

- Does CWB provide resources for domestic violence victims? The division provides comprehensive support.
- What are some solutions for homelessness? Commerce City relies on neighboring counties and Denver for shelters, as none exist within the city.
- What assistance exists for elderly residents? The division helps seniors, even those on long waiting lists, for housing and provides ongoing support.
- How can the community be more involved? Residents are encouraged to attend City Council meetings to voice concerns and request resources.
- What workshops are available? Workshops on financial resources, tenant rights, and legal aid are held at recreational centers and apartment settings.
- What support exists for youth leadership? The division offers youth leadership opportunities and can organize workshops tailored for young residents.
- Expand workshop offerings to broaden its workshop offerings, including those focused on youth leadership and special needs programs.
- Community engagement is encouraged as ongoing community input helps refine and expand the division's services.

Fourth Meeting Summary

On Friday, Feb. 16, 2024, staff members from the Parks and Streets Division of Public Works welcomed LET #5 in the community room at the Municipal Services Center for an open conversation.

Topics Discussed

- Attendees expressed appreciation for installing speed bumps near schools, which have improved safety
- Question about speed bump sizes being inconsistent widths across different locations
- Discussion about constructing a pedestrian bridge for Adams City High School over Quebec, similar to one at Thornton High School on Washington Street.
- Conversation for goals and improvements including improving pedestrian safety near schools and busy intersections; enhancing traffic control measures to reduce speeding and traffic violations; and increasing visibility on residential streets.
- A variety of trash and recycling events are available throughout the year and information is available at c3gov.com/Trash
- Access C3 is a tool for reporting any illegal dumping in a public area

Comments by Cohort

- Attendees requested a speed bump near the 64th & Holly intersection and the 66th and Kearney intersection along with a potential police presence, to enforce speed limits
- Suggestion to increase the use of cameras, create higher fines for stop sign violations, and enhance police presence, particularly near schools to reduce the amount of speeding
- A mother attending Nuestra Senora Madre de la Iglesia suggested moving the crosswalk at 72nd Ave and Niagara closer to 72nd and Magnolia for improved pedestrian safety
- Cohort emphasized the need to enhance safety and visibility on various residential streets in the historic city center

- Request was made to reinstall or add visibility-enhancing objects at the intersection of Oneida and 66th, where a mirror previously helped alert traffic but is no longer present
- Requests for follow-up on community improvements under the Healthy Places grant (2019-2021) at the Adams County High School tunnel and 72nd And Quebec Street crosspoint
- Request for information on the limitations of bulk item removal services
- Request for printed information included recycling guidelines, including what can and cannot be recycled; schedules for bulk item pickups that pick up mattresses and tires; and street sweeping and trash collection schedules
- Suggestion was made for city experts to educate residents on proper recycling practices, emphasizing the need to bridge generational knowledge gaps
- Question asking what happens to recycling items when they are rejected
- Need for increased awareness and enforcement against illegal dumping of items like tires, mattresses, and furniture
- Enforcement needed against non-residents using apartment dumpsters for bulk items
- Enhance recycling education for residents
- Recommended to increase transparency about the recycling process
- Recommended to increase enforcement of illegal dumping

Fifth Meeting Summary

On Friday, March 22, 2024, Environmental Planner III, Libby Tart, and Sustainability Associate, Olivia Quagliani, presented on behalf of the Energy, Equity, and Environmental (E3) Division.

Topics Discussed

- E3 is the newest division in the City Manager's Office, leading the city's charge toward a more sustainable and equitable future
- Between the team of three, they divide ten focus areas including education and empowerment; energy efficiency and renewables; adaptations and mitigation; waste diversion; water conservation & quality; active transportation; health and well-being; purchasing and funding; local food resiliency; tree canopy and biodiversity
- There are environmental concerns leading the E3 efforts because Commerce City is at a crossroads with significant environmental health challenges. The city has high exposures to air toxins, including particulate matter 2.5, and pollutants in water and soil.
- Recent achievements include a new presence on the city website, two community gardens at Village Crest Apartments and Anythink Library, and outreach events
- E3 fosters the next generation of environmental stewards by working with high school interns on sustainability projects
- E3 is exploring collaborations with local organizations, such as Cultivando, to amplify environmental justice efforts and connect residents with City Council initiatives.
- The division plans to continue to expand events and workshops on topics like gardening, recycling, and creating green spaces to empower residents to take an active role in environmental stewardship
- At the time, the Environmental Policy Advisory Committee had two open positions, inviting residents to take an active role in shaping the city's environmental policies

Comments by Cohort

- Residents emphasized the need for more bilingual materials and events, suggesting that these could help bridge communication gaps and encourage broader participation
- There is a strong community interest in expanding recycling education and opportunities.
- Cohort noted the challenges of relying solely on online information and asked for more direct and in-person engagement

Sixth Meeting Summary

On Friday, April 19, 2024, the recreation division invited LET #5 to the Bison Ridge Recreation Center to give them a tour of the facility and tell them about the programs available, the conversation was led by Marty Walsh and the tour was given by Alexis Ferrer.

Topics Discussed

- The city owns two recreation centers, Eagle Pointe and Bison Ridge, both include fitness gyms, classes, pools, and other amenities including community rooms
- The community rooms at each recreation center are different, Bison Ridge offers three large community rooms for events that residents can rent for \$45 per hour per room, with extended hours available
- Both recreation centers have fitness rooms that are available for drop-in use when not used for group and private classes
- The indoor pools include a water slide and aerobic area, and private swimming lessons are available
- Childcare services are available at \$5 for 90 minutes with various time slots throughout the week
- Patty Lisbeth then came to discuss the range of outdoor and specialized programs she oversees
- There are camps and excursions available for youth and families, including horseback riding and rafting for different age groups
- The Parks, Recreation, and Golf (PRG) Department also oversees the city-owned golf course and restaurant. Bison Grill is a full-service restaurant located at the Buffalo Run Golf Course.
- The PRG Department also oversees the operations of the city-owned aquatic theme park, Paradise Island, which opened for the year on May 25, 2024, with affordable entry fees
- There are employment opportunities with flexible jobs for ages 14 and up, with extra pay for bilingual staff, all jobs are available at c3gov.com/Jobs and as an employment benefit, all employees receive a \$5 annual membership
- PRG offers a variety of resources to ensure accessibility and engagement for all residents.
- Scholarships are available that apply to programs over \$20, ensuring cost is not a barrier to those interested in recreation
- PRG also hosts the Active Adult Programs which serves the senior community over 55+ with an active adult center at Eagle Pointe and another coming at Bison Ridge

Comments by Cohort

- Residents expressed interest in learning new recipes together as a family, suggested having family cooking classes
- Requests for more Zumba classes and the addition of salsa and swing dance.
- In relation to programming, morning sessions are preferred by many community members.
- There was a strong interest in offering sewing classes.

Seventh Meeting Summary

On Friday, May 17, 2024, Jordan Roberts (Deputy City Clerk), Brittany Rios (Assistant City Clerk), and Yadira Dosal (Licensing Coordinator), all from the City Clerk's Office gave a presentation about their services and responsibilities.

Topics Discussed

- The Clerk's Office was one of the oldest public offices, dating back to biblical times when clerks were known as "Remembrancers" or "Memorialists."
- The office was historically responsible for reading official documents publicly, safeguarding records, and ensuring transparency.
- In medieval times, clerks were scholars who attended council meetings to remind officials of previous discussions.
- The Clerk's Office has a team of seven (five full-time and two part-time employees) with a budget of \$760,000. Responsibilities include the main phone line and information desk; document scanning and retention; passport services; sales tax payments; business, liquor, and marijuana licensing; City Council agenda management; boards and commission administration; and elections.
- Bilingual services are available at the Civic Center, an initiative from the first Latino Engagement Taskforce in 2016.
- Passport services are offered Monday through Thursday from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. (with specific guidelines for minors and bilingual assistance)
- Licensing processes, including business and special licenses, are managed by Yadira Dosal through an online portal
- The office also manages City Council meetings, ensures compliance with the Open Meetings Law, coordinates with the Mayor, City Attorney, and City Manager, and maintains records.
- The City Council meetings follow a structured order, including public comments, resolutions, ordinances, and reports.
- Public comment is limited to three minutes, and participants can register in person or via Zoom.
- The city's boards and commissions involve residents in city affairs, offering a chance to advise the City Council on various issues. Information on these opportunities is available online.

Comments by Cohort

- Increase the number of clinics in the city.
- Address concerns about safety in parks and cleanliness of public spaces.
- Enhance lighting in parks to improve safety.
- Expand recycling programs, especially in underserved communities.
- Create zones in front of all schools, including Adams City High School.
- Develop a role (Promotora) to bridge the community with city resources and improve communication.
- Interest in receiving more information about city staff salaries and the hiring process.
- Desire for better representation of the Latino community in city positions and decision-making processes.

Official Recommendations from LET #5

- Enhanced communication: Improve communication channels between city departments and the Latino community. Ensure information is accessible, culturally relevant, and available in Spanish.
 - The city must update new staff about the LET history and follow-up process. LET has been involved in providing information to the city over the past five years, and we would like to receive updates on the status of these proposals.
 - The community is requesting more information regarding the salaries of city staff and the hiring process. We have noticed turnover in these positions that does not align with the proposals and changes that would benefit the Latino community.
- Cultural sensitivity training: Implement regular cultural sensitivity and awareness training for city employees and law enforcement to foster trust and understanding within the Latino community.
- Increased representation: Encourage additional Latino representation in city leadership roles and advisory boards to ensure the community's voice is adequately represented in decision-making processes.
- Youth engagement: Develop programs specifically to engage Latino youth in civic activities, provide them with leadership opportunities, and involve them in community decision-making.
- Community events and outreach: Organize more community events focused on Latino culture to strengthen community bonds and celebrate cultural diversity. A job opening for a Promotora could help establish relationships with city organizations and keep the city informed about community issues and barriers.
- Improved public safety: Work on building stronger relationships between the Latino community and law enforcement, focusing on community policing and transparency to enhance public safety.
- Access to services: Ensure that all city services are accessible to the Latino community and that clear guidance is provided on navigating these services.

Key Takeaways from LET #5

- **Strong community desire for engagement:** The Latino community in Commerce City is eager to engage with local government and be involved in decisions that affect their lives. There is a clear desire for more inclusive policies and practices.
- **Need for trust building:** Trust between the Latino community and city officials, including law enforcement, must be strengthened. Addressing past concerns and ensuring ongoing communication are crucial steps.
- **Youth as a priority:** The community prioritizes youth as the city's future leaders. Engaging them early in civic activities is vital for long-term community growth.
- **Cultural celebration:** The Latino community values celebrating and acknowledging their culture. This recognition fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens community ties.

These recommendations and takeaways provide a roadmap for future actions that the City Council and relevant departments can take to serve better and engage the Latino community in Commerce City.